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ABSTRACT

Selected findings drawn from research studies on journalism and work are discussed. The social science research methodologies employed by Herbert J. Gans and Stephen Hess are described with attention to story selection and general reporters and beat reporters. Selected journalistic research in the fields of science, business, and education are also examined. Gans used field work or participant-observation methods to study how journalists with four organizations selected and reported news, and why they chose their topics. Hess developed a questionnaire that he administered to a sample of Washington reporters to determine stories written daily, who initiated them, and who was interviewed. He also analyzed news stories. It is noted that more research has been directed to journalistic science reporting. Findings of the most important studies are briefly reviewed. Studies focusing on whether the news media have an anti-business bias are also reviewed. Lastly, findings of Gerbner's research on the views of education editors or writers are reported. It is concluded that the relationships between journalistic activity and higher education is relatively unstudied, including the question of how the media shapes public opinion concerning higher education. (SW)

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Research on Journalism as Work: Implications for Education

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HE 017 341

Presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education in Chicago, Illinois, March, 1984.

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, March 12-14, 1984. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Journalism and education share a common distinction, both are the focus of much social commentary, criticism and decline in public confidence. We in education are aware of the sharp and biting character of that criticism, much of it produced by the news media. However, our fate is their fate, for journalists too have been soundly taken to task. To illustrate, a recent Time magazine (12/12/83) cover story entitled "Accusing the Press: What Are Its Sins" contains data from a National Opinion Research Center survey which reports that 29.2% of 1983 respondents had a great deal of confidence in education and 13.7% in the press, only slightly above Congress (10.2%). Practitioners in both fields probably should be pleased about the attention for it demonstrates the relationship of education and journalism to national goals. Perhaps the criticism also grows from the evaluative function associated with both occupations: education--of students, journalism--of persons and programs. As we know, evaluation frequently evokes mistrust, emotionalism and examination by those evaluated. Unlike education, journalism has the power of direct response, persuasion and interpretation. It is this dimension of journalistic work, power, which provokes close scrutiny by the public, for as William L. Rivers argues, the press is The Other Government (1982):

> Indeed, in Washington today, correspondents who report for the news media possess a power beyond even their own dreams and fears. They are only beginning to become aware that their work now shapes and colors the beliefs of nearly everyone, not only in the United States but throughout most of the world. p. 10.

I suppose this presentation is testimony to the power of the press, to the fear of a hostile or adversary press, to the necessity of understanding how it works so that we can work with it satisfactorily.

The purpose of this presentation is to share with you selected findings drawn from research studies on journalism as work.

Descriptive studies of what the practitioner actually does in performing an occupation have research outcomes as well as practical outcomes such as increased productivity, work redesign, and, in our case, expanding our information base about the field. This increased understanding of journalism should enable us to assess our relationship and research needs. I plan to focus on a number of research studies about journalism work conducted by social scientists who have used both qualitative and quantitive methodologies. Autobiographical and biographical statements about careers have been excluded because they usually describe one person's career, usually a star. On the other hand much of the current research on journalism work is about the Big League: Time, Newsweek, the Washington Press Corp, the three television networks, with very little of it examining the regionals or locals. I will draw heavily on books of two social scientists: Herbert J. Gans of Columbia University and Stephen Hess of The Brookings Institution, plus a number of studies appearing in various scholarly journals. I will first describe methodological aspects of the work of Gans and Hess with the remainder of the presentation organized around the following topics: story selection, general reporters and beat reporters and conclude with an examination of selected journalistic research in the fields of science, business and education.

Research Methods: Gans Deciding What's News
Hess The Washington Reporters

Since much of the literature about journalism as work is anecdotal and impressionistic, it seems appropriate to demonstrate that these two significant studies use acceptable social science research methodologies.

Gan's work is a study of CBS Evening News, NBC Night News, Time and Newsweek magazines, all of which he classified as reaching a nationwide audience. Using field work or participant-observation methods, he studied how journalists in these organizations selected news, how they reported it, why they chose what they did and their backgrounds. He visited each for four months in 1965 and 1969, then spent another month in 1975 at NBC, Time and Newsweek and interviewed at CBS. As he states "...the world had changed between my two field work periods, but the way journalists work had not..." p.XII. As with his other recent books using similar techniques: The Levittowners and The Urban Villagers, he presents the findings as observations and investigations with little quantification.

The Hess study, began in 1977, employed an interview lasting from one to two hours of 150 Washington reporters from which, in 1978, a questionnaire was designed, tested, revised and mailed to 1,250 Washington reporters with 292 usable responses returned. Fourteen pages of the 16 page instrument were in the form of a daily log where the respondents indicated for each day of a single week, the stories worked on, who initiated them, who was interviewed, what types of events did they attend, what documents did they use as background, and so on. The respondents also responded to a different telephone survey later in the year so Hess had telephone plus mail questionnaire responses. These procedures yielded a group which represented

38% of all Washington reporters. Hess also analyzed a week of Washington stories appearing in April, 1978 in 22 newspapers, on the weeknight news programs of the three TV networks and in a weekly news magazine. All total, he coded 2,022 stories. These data, then, form the basis for the study. His conclusion to the methodology description tells something about the state of media research:

> The Washington Reporters is the first of several books I hope to write about the press in the United States...The need is to explain how the press fits into the web of governance, and to create research tools and a body of data for others to use in future investigations. The memoirs of journalists, while often valuable as pieces of history, are designed for other purposes. Schools of journalism or communication are primarly centers of training, not research. Departments of political science or government seem to have a long-studying bias against this area of inquiry. Too bad. Journalists are great fun to study. p.XII.

The Reporters Reality - Selecting the Story

News stories are about people and events or a combination of both, thus, as Gans points out, journalists must select from millions of people and billions of events in reporting news. Odbviously the vast amount of people or events are never chosen as a basis for a news story.

To make the decision-making task manageable, journalists must routinize their decision making procedures to some extent in selecting stories. Gans reviews a nunber of theories about how the selection process is routinized.

1. Journalists may select stories on the basis of their news judgment, thus news becomes shaped by the judgment of journalists. Critics argue this opens the potential for biased reporting.

2. The news organization; its structure, commercial necessities, division of labor, all affect story selection.
3. News selection may be shaped by forces external to the news organization, for example by the ideology of news sources, and so on.
4. Mirror theory suggests that journalists hold a mirror to events and then reflect them to the audience.

This latter theory has been investigated by researchers such as Tuchman to describe the work of journalists. She argues along with other phenomenologists that external reality (events) can only be perceived through the person's individual frame of reference. Thus each journalist possesses a filter composed of concepts, attitudes, values, etc. through which reality is perceived. When journalists are described as "creating reality," it simply means the application of the filtering mechanism. These notions truly lead to research about the traits and education of journalists in an attempt to understand the selection process.

Gans combines these various theories into the following conception of the process:

> I view news as information which is transmitted from sources to audiences, with journalists - who are employees of bureaucratic commercial organizations and members of a profession - summarizing, refining, and altering what becomes available to them from sources in order to make the information suitable for their audiences. Because news has consequences, however, journalists are susceptible to pressure from groups and individuals (including sources and audiences) with power to hurt them, their organizations, and their forms. p.80.

This definition reveals many potential research issues. Although it appears linear, he suggests the process is circular with many feedback loops. To illustrate, the audience is not only a target for the journalist, but provides income for the news organization. Thus story selection is composed of two elements: (1) the availability of news through sources and (2) the suitability of news for the journalist's audience. We in higher education are sources with information; for that information to become news requires some relation with journalists. However the source--journalist encounter does not imply that the news generated will be viewed as suitable for the journalist's audience. A second implication is that some higher education sources have easier access to journalists than others, indeed they may be sought out by journalists. For example, the president of Harvard University has more power as a source than the president of a community college in Michigan.

Characteristics and Suitability of News Sources

The work of the journalist consists of obtaining news from information sources. Thus, as Gans observes, journalists seek sources and sources seek journalists each for their own purpose. For us in higher education, his description of four factors shaping a successful encounter between source and journalist has utility.

1. Incentives

   Some sources may be eager to provide information and provide information through a variety of mechanisms. Sources may be agreeable but not eager to provide information, and often may be recalcitrant about providing information. Recalcitrant sources bar access to journalists which may result in a hostile press, or investigative reporting or both.

2. Power of Sources

   As pointed out earlier some sources have far more power of access to journalists than others. Such power frequently reflects the hierarchical structure of our nation and society. Sources with little power can frequently gain access with a very dramatic story.

3. Ability to Supply Suitable Information

   Considering the need of journalists for news, this factor is crucial to the encounter. A large research university has an almost unlimited supply of information with appeal to journalists.

4. Geographic and Social Proximity

   The closer the information source is to the journalist the more likely it is that it will become news.

Gans found that journalists viewed some sources as more suitable than others on the basis of the following considerations:

1. Past suitability
2. Productivity
3. Reliability
4. Trustworthiness
5. Authoritativeness
6. Articulateness

General Reporters and Beat Reporters

Both Gans and Hess identify two different types of reporters: those who concentrate on certain areas or activities (beat) and those who do general assignment reporting. Beat reporters may be assigned to a specific location (city hall) or may concentrate on a speciality such as education, science, the economy, etc. Gans demonstrates that a hazard to speciality reporting is

co-option by the source because of the symbiotic relationship between source and journalist. Cannon (1977) in his book, Reporting: An Inside View, goes so far as to say:

> On no beat that I have covered, including the White House, does a reporter have to be more determined to resist co-option than he does in covering education, where there is a great tendency by schoolmen to assume that everyone shares their premises. p. 137.

Data reported by Hess shows the distribution of Washington reporters by beat and the prestige of the beats. Regional refers to news which has a direct relationship to the paper's circulation: Class A general assignments are given to senior persons who get to pick their own story, and Class B general assignments refer to assignment of events which may produce news outside the main flow of news. For the most part, Class B beat reporters are younger, less experienced and frequently female. In short the younger, less experienced, less well educated Washington reporters are given the least desirable assignments. Education may well fall into this category. Another problem with education as a beat is that 80% of Washington news stories are concerned with hard (breaking news) and education news, typically is soft rather than hard.

Another finding of Hess is that reporters do very little homework about the stories under preparation and when they do use documents to verify information, they turn to stories about the topic by other reporters. He reports that only one quarter of the reporters covering law read law journals, and economics reporters read popular business magazines for background information. This suggests that most education reporters have a very superficial understanding of the field. Hess's data suggest that very few

journalists have had either graduate or undergraduate work in education although the majority have experienced higher education as a student. Note the number who have had a background in science/technology.

Journalists as Science Reporters

Science is probably the speciality area where the most research has been conducted about the background and accuracy of the journalist. This section will review the findings of the more important studies.

1. Ryan and Dunwoody (1975), polling members of the National Association of Science writers, report that 62% earned the B.A. degree and 22% the M.A. The most popular undergraduate major was English and journalism. Fifty-five percent took at least one graduate level course and 23% more than ten. Most science writers recommended that potential science journalists have specialized science writing courses. They also tended to recommend more liberal arts than anything else including science/technical courses.
2. Tichenor, Olien, Harrison and Donohue (1970) had scientists review the accuracy of articles written about their research and report an average rate of 65% accuracy.
3. Dunwoody and Scott (1982) found that higher ranking scientists had been in contact with journalists more often than lower ranking scientists. Seventy-five percent of all scientists in the study said they would welcome the next contact and 11% said they would argue with the interview but viewed it as a necessary evil. Even so, scientists were highly critical of media coverage, particularly in their areas of expertise.

4. In a research review article of science reporting Cronholm and Sandell (1981) concluded that research is needed to study the extent to which experiential, attitudinal and other personality variables affect the source and the journalist in selecting and presenting scientific information.
5. Shepherd (1979) studied the amount of "news refraction," that is distortion between science findings and how they are reported in the media. He argues that two kinds of news refraction exist: (1) simple inaccuracy in reporting and (2) selective bias where the press either reveals systematic bias by favoring one position or exaggerates the findings to suit the purpose of sensationalism. He studied the case of marijuana in the press and concluded there was some minor refraction but a respectable job of reporting was done.

Media Bias Toward Business?

Barrett, (1978) and Hynds (1980) have recently raised the question about the amount of distortion in business reporting: does the news media have an anti-business bias?

1. Lichter and Rothman (1981) in an article "Media and Business Elites" suggested that attitudes of media elites (240 journalists in most influential media outlets) were much more liberal than business elites (216 business persons in seven Fortune 500 companies). The thrust of the article was that (1) media elites identify themselves as liberals (over the sixteen year period 1964-1976, less than one-fifth of the media elite supported any Republican presidential candidate); (2) they

see business as a powerful influence on American society. Yet the business leaders saw the media as the most important influence followed distantly by labor. Thus, each attributes great power to the other, and each wishes to strip the other of some influence. These authors have followed that paper with a series of others on the same topic. Many business people claimed this proves media bias.

2. Yet Robinson (1983) in his Media Analysis Project at George Washington University of the 1980 year-long political campaign shows that some Eastern liberal press reported the political news in a reasonably non-political way. As he says "Bias that counts must be in the copy, not just in the minds of those who write it." p. 56.
3. Peterson, Kozmetsky and Cunningham (1982) asked 2,400 households whether or not the news media present a biased or unbiased view of business. They concluded that bias is in the eye of the beholder with those classifying themselves as Republican, politically or socially conservative or being in a household where the head is a manager, saw the media as biased. Those with other characteristics saw the opposite.
4. Parsons sampled 400 executive editors and news editors in an attempt to determine if editorial bias or opinion colors news reporting. He was unable to demonstrate such a spill-over effect and cautions, as did Robinson, that political labels are no guarantee of news bias.

Education and the Media

As pointed out earlier, not much research has been conducted in this area. The only substantial report is by Gerbner (1967) in which he reports survey data about the "school beat." In 1961 he (then Dean of the Annenberg

School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania) investigated the views of education editors or writers associated with 119 daily newspapers, with circulations of over 100,000, receiving a response from 32 of them. He also queried directors of public information in all school districts served by the papers and some colleges and universities in the area. The study was prompted by a postwar boom in education reporting and generally expressed concern about both the quality and quantity of information about education. A summary of his findings follows below:

1. The number of education reporters had increased substantially since the 1950s but so had assignments in other areas. Most of the reporters were young and relatively inexperienced with few old-times on the beat.
2. Much of the education news reported reflected the local situation with few attempts to focus on broad national issues.
3. Most of the respondents felt that neither teaching experience nor professional work in education was a necessary prerequisite to education reporting. Work in the field reduces objectivity they claimed.
4. Education reporters used the materials produced by school information persons as a basis for much of their work. Even so, they believed professional educators do not have a good feeling for what is news worthy.
5. Many complained about the secrecy of school board meetings and the attempts of school people to control news.
6. A number of problem areas in journalists' contacts with schoolmen were identified: secretiveness, lack of confidence, use of jargon, differing conception of the meaning of news value.

Gerbner concluded his study by stating that the average school reporter is sincere and understands the significance of his assignment. The reporter has more support than in pervious years but is concerned about the beat's prestige. Mobility is high and the press for hard news dictates the paper's response to educational issues. Unfortunately the Gerbner study is clearly out-of-date and perhaps is most useful as a basis for evaluating change.

Several more recent articles have focused on aspects of the relationship between education and media coverage. Dickson (1975) reported that both editors and education reporters were generally satisfied with the amount of coverage education received in their respective publications. Gorton (1979) surveyed secondary school principals and reported they were neutral about the impact of news media on their schools, and a number believed it had negative influence. A survey of newspaper editors by Hynds (1981) indicated that many newspapers are expanding and improving educational coverage but fewer than half have a full time reporter assigned to education. Gene Maeroff (1980), education editor, New York Times, reported his views on the relationship between the media and schools, including the role of the media in covering education, the types of educational news the media are likely to report, and schools' responsibilities in cooperating with the media.

Conclusions:

Two general conclusions emerge from this review of research about journalism as work.

1. Journalism, as is education, is undergoing a crisis of purpose. In part this is a function of its perceived influence by the public and in part by the rapid changes in society. Whatever, the media carry a

heavy burden attempting to make sense for us of a complex nation and world. Recent articles about the way in which journalists should be educated is one illustration of concern about the role of media in our society (Sitton, 1983; Bagdikian, 1977). The need for research on the media is pressing considering the role played by it in creating intellectual coherence.

2. Education too faces similar issues and problems. The relationships between journalistic activity and higher education is relatively unstudied. What is it about higher education that we want reported? What is reported? To what extent does the media shape the public's view of higher education? Indeed this is a fertile field for investigation.

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Figure 1

THEORIES OF NEWS SELECTION

- Journalists' News Judgment
- Structure of News Organization
- External Forces
- Mirror Theory

Figure 2

The News Process

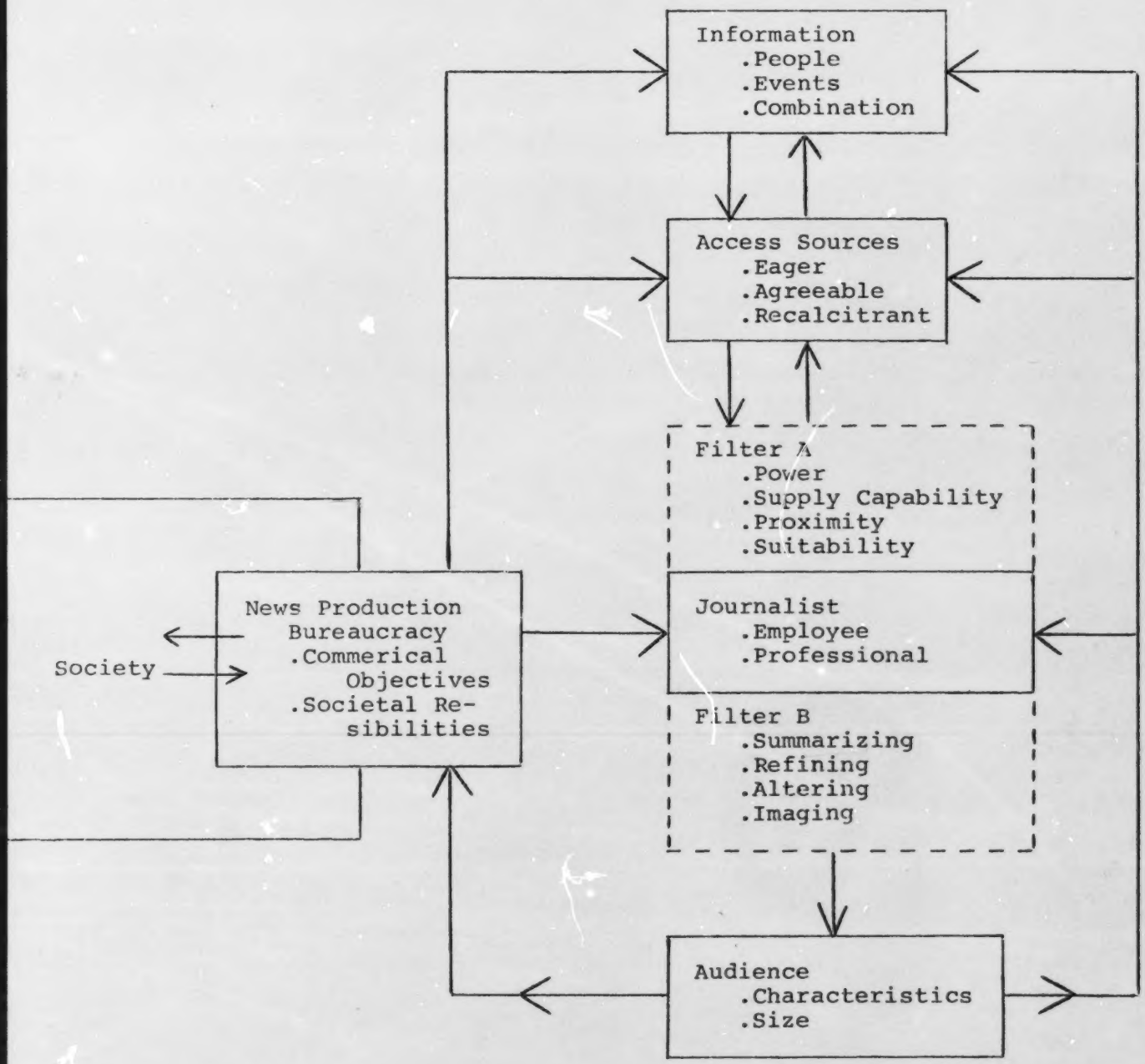

Figure 3

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWS SOURCES

- Incentives: Eager, Agreeable, Recalcitrant
- Power of Sources
- Ability to Supply Suitable Information
- Geographic and Social Proximity

SUITABILITY OF SOURCES

- Past Suitability
- Productivity
- Reliability
- Trustworthiness
- Authoritativeness
- Articulateness

Figure 4

WASHINGTON REPORTERS BY BEAT

Beat	Rank by Size	Reporters %
Regional	1	14
Class B general assignment	2	12
Domestic agencies	3	10
Congress	4	8
Class A general assignment	5	8
Economics	6	7
Diplomacy	7	7
White House	8	5
Law	9	5
Politics	10	4
Energy	11	4
Regulatory agencies	12	2
Science	13	2
Other	-	10
Unknown	-	3

Figure 5

BEAT PRESTIGE

High

Diplomacy 1
Class A general assignment 2
Law 3
Politics 4
White House 5

Medium

Congress 6
Science 7
Energy 8

Low

Domestic agencies 9
Regulatory agencies 10
Economics 11
Class B general assignment 12
Regional 13

Figure 6

WASHINGTON STORIES - NEWSPAPERS

Subject	Rank	%
Foreign policy	1	12
Economics/finance	2	10.9
Government operations	3	6.7
Scandals	4	6.4
Law	5	5.9
Politics	6	4.7
Business	7	4.7
Energy	8	4.3
Agriculture	9	3.8
Defense	10/11	3.3
Regulatory policy	10/11	3.3

WASHINGTON STORIES - TELEVISION

Subject	Rank	%
Foreign policy	1	24
Economics/finance	2	17
Scandals	3	6.0
Politics	4/5	5.5
Agriculture	4/5	5.5
Law	6	5.0
Consumer Affairs	7	4.5
Energy	8/9	3.5
Defense	8/9	3.5
Government operations	10/11	3
Education	10/11	3

Figure 7

FIELDS OF STUDY

Percent

Subject	Reporters %
Undergraduate	
Humanities liberal arts	61.5
Journalism	23.9
Science technology	14.6
Number of undergraduate fields	(644)
Graduates	
Humanities liberal arts	29.9
Journalism	47.6
Science technology	22.5
Number of graduate fields	(231)
Undergraduate and graduate	
Humanities/liberal arts only	33.1
Humanities/liberal arts + journalism	24.7
Journalism only	15.6
Humanities/liberal arts + science/technology	10.2
Science/technology only	7.4
Science/technology + journalism	5.6
Humanities/liberal arts + journalism + science/technology	3.5
Number of undergraduate and graduate fields	(875)